

Remarks to the National Governors' Association

February 2, 1993

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Governor Romer, ladies and gentlemen. I felt pretty good sitting at that table although that's my real place over there. *[Laughter]* We had a wonderful meeting yesterday, I thought, for a long time, maybe the longest time a President has ever met with a group of Governors, but we were discussing a terribly important issue: health care. And then we also got to discuss the deficit crisis and the budget problems a little bit.

I wanted to come here today, as you prepare to leave, to once again reaffirm my commitment to working in partnership with the Governors. You deal with real people in a more immediate way than, unfortunately, the President often gets to do. When I was a Governor, every day I would hear directly from people or see people who had suffered from layoffs or had their businesses closed down or who were afraid of losing their health coverage or who desperately wanted to improve their schools.

As you and I learned from last year's elections, the only pattern was not a partisan one. It was a pattern of determination on the part of the American people to have their political system and their Government address their real concerns. They don't want our process divided by partisanship or dominated by special interest or driven by short-term advantage. They know things that have too often been forgotten here over the last dozen years. The values that are central to our country's character must be central to our Government: work, family, faith, opportunity, responsibility, and community.

What I appreciated about this meeting is that no matter what our region or our party, we've always gotten together and tried to pay serious attention to our problems. I think the Governors have exemplified for the last dozen years the bold, persistent experimentation that President Roosevelt called for at the beginning of the Great Depression when he took office. And I'm here to tell you that I'm going to do everything I can to work with you in partnership to share ideas and re-

sources and energy to try to do what we can to move this country forward.

As we discussed health care, economic policy, and the deficit yesterday, I'd like to spend just a few moments today talking about something that many of us have been working on since the middle 1980's, the issue of welfare reform.

I've often spoken with many of you about the need to end welfare as we know it, to make it a program that supports people who have fallen on hard times or who have difficulties that can be overcome, but eventually and ultimately, a program that helps people to get on their feet through health care, child care, job training, and ultimately a productive job.

No one likes the welfare system as it currently exists, least of all the people who are on it. The taxpayers, the social service employees themselves don't think much of it either. Most people on welfare are yearning for another alternative, aching for the chance to move from dependence to dignity. And we owe it to them to give them that chance.

In the middle 1980's, when I was a Governor here, I worked with Governor Castle, now a Member of the Congress—he and Governor Carper changed jobs, and in 6 months they're going to have a vote to see who won and who lost—*[laughter]*—to try to work with the Congress to develop a national welfare reform program. With the support of people in the House and the Senate, with the particular help of Senator Moynihan, now the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and with the support of the White House, the Governors had an unprecedented role in writing the Family Support Act of 1988, which President Reagan signed into law shortly before he left office, and which Senator Moynihan said was the most significant piece of social reform in this area in the last generation.

The Family Support Act embodies a principle which I believe is the basis of an emerging consensus among people without regard to party or without regard to their traditional political philosophies. We must provide people on welfare with more opportunities for job training, with the assurance that they will receive the health care and child care they need when they go to work, and with all the

opportunities they need to become self-sufficient. But then we have to ask them to make the most of these opportunities and to take a job.

As all of you know, the States never had the chance to fully implement the Welfare Reform Act of 1988 for two reasons: first, because over the last 4 years the welfare rolls have exploded everywhere and health care costs have gone up as the job market has declined and the economy has grown at the slowest rate in half a century; secondly, because of the economic problems, Government revenues have been down and the Congress and the administration were never able to fully fund the education and training portion of the act. This was clearly manifested not only in the growth of welfare rolls but in the fact that last year, for the first time since the program began, 1 in 10 Americans were on food stamps. So as the weak economy left millions of more in poverty, and the welfare rolls increased 5 times greater during the last 4 years than under the previous two administrations combined, it made it more difficult to make welfare reform work.

In spite of that, I think it would be a great mistake to conclude that that act was of no significance or that nothing good has occurred. Bipartisan efforts in State after State from New Jersey to Georgia, to Wisconsin, and many others all across the country, have resulted in innovative approaches to help move people off welfare rolls and onto pay-rolls.

In our State, through the program we call Project Success, more than 17,000 people moved from welfare to work. And more importantly, at a time when the rolls were exploding, our rolls grew much more slowly than the national average. Many of you have your own successes to report, and I had the opportunity to visit in many of the States, here represented, projects that were terribly impressive to me.

I say this to make the following point: The bill that is on the books will work, given the right economy and the right kind of support systems, but we need to do more than fully implement it; we need to do that and go beyond.

I salute you for forming a State officials advisory group on welfare reform with Gov-

ernors and legislators and health and welfare directors from 10 States. I want to tell you today that within the next 10 days I will announce a welfare reform group to work with you. I will ask top officials from the White House, the Health and Human Services, and other agencies involved to sit down with Governors and congressional leaders and develop a welfare reform plan that will work. I have asked the best people in the Nation on this subject to come and help me do this.

The day I took office I promised the American people I would fight for more opportunity for all and demand more responsibility from all. And that is a commitment I am determined to keep, with your help, by putting an end to welfare as we know it.

Our working group will learn from and work with State officials, business and labor folks, and leaders from every walk of life who care about this issue. On welfare reform, as on health care reform, there are no top-down, made-in-Washington solutions that will work for everyone. The problems and the progress are to be found in the communities of this country.

But I do want to tell you the principles this morning that will guide my administration as we work with you to reform welfare. First, welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life. I want to give people on welfare the education and training and the opportunities they need to become self-sufficient. To make sure they can do it after they go to work, they must still have access to health care and to child care. So many people stay on welfare not because of the checks. The benefit levels, as many of you know, in real dollar terms, are lower than they were 20 years ago. They do it solely because they do not want to put their children at risk of losing health care or because they do not have the money to pay for child care out of the meager wages they can earn coming from a low education base. We have got to deal with that.

I believe 2 years after a training program is completed, you have to ask people to take a job ultimately, either in the private sector or in public service. There must be, in addition to the full implementation of the welfare reform act of 1988, in my opinion, a time-certain beyond which people don't draw a check for doing nothing when they can do

something. And there is a lot of work out there to be done.

Senator Boren and Senator Wofford have offered a bill to try to recreate on a very limited basis a pilot project that would take the best of what was done with the work programs of the thirties and try to throw them into the context of the nineties. We must begin now to plan for a time when people will ultimately be able to work for the check they get, whether the check comes from a private employer or from the United States taxpayers.

Today, about half the people on welfare are just the people welfare was meant to help. They fall on hard times, and they have to have public assistance. They're eager to move on with their lives. And after 5 or 6 months or 8 months they're right back at work again, struggling to make their way in the American way. About half the people on welfare stay on for over 2 years. But one in four persons, the people that we really need to try to help to break the cycle that is gripping their children and grandchildren, about one in four stays a recipient for 8 years or longer. Those are the folks that Governor Wilder I know is now working on, that many of you have tried to address the problems of, and I want to help you with that.

Second, we need to make work pay. We have to make sure that every American who works full-time, with a child in the home, does not live in poverty. If there is dignity in all work, there must be dignity for every worker. Therefore, I will propose an expansion in the earned-income tax credit which supplements the income of the working poor.

We can do that. We ought to be able to lift people who work 40 hours a week, with kids in their home, out of poverty. And we will remove the incentive for staying in poverty. It will be much less expensive than to have Government direct supplements to pay people to remain idle. And it will reinforce the work ethic. If we can do that and at the same time do what we discussed yesterday, control health care costs and expand coverage so that no one has to stay on welfare just to take care of their children's medical needs, I think you will see a dramatic breakthrough in our efforts to liberate people from their dependency.

Third, we need tougher child support enforcement. An estimated 15 million children have parents who could pay child support but don't. We need to make sure that they do. Parents owe billions of dollars in child support that is unpaid, money that could go a long way toward cutting the welfare rolls and lifting single parents out of poverty and money that could go a long way toward helping us control Government expenditures and reducing that debt. We're going to toughen child support enforcement by creating a national databank to track down deadbeat parents, by having the States go as far as they possibly can to establish paternity at the hospital when children are born, and if I can prevail up here, by using the IRS to collect unpaid support in seriously delinquent cases. I've said it before because it's the simple truth: Governments don't raise children, people do. And even people who aren't around ought to do their part to raise the children they bring into this world.

Fourth, we need to encourage experimentation in the States. I will say again what you know so well: There are many promising initiatives right now at the State and local level, and we will work with you to encourage that kind of experimentation. I do not want the Federal Government, in pushing welfare reforms based on these general principles, to rob you of the ability to do more, to do different things. And I want to try to flesh out a little bit of the idea we discussed yesterday about the waivers. My view is that we ought to give you more elbow room to experiment.

I know I was perplexed during the recent campaign when I tried to make a statement that some people in the press said reflected waffling, and it seemed to me to express the real genius of the federal system. I said that if I were President I would approve waivers of experiments that I did not necessarily agree with. And they said, "You're trying to have it both ways." I said, "No, I'm not. I'm trying to honor the Founding Fathers." If we didn't disagree on anything, what would be the need for experiments? That is the nature of the experiment, is that one person has an idea different from another person.

So I will encourage all of us to work together to try things that are different. And the only thing I want to ask you in return

is, let us measure these experiments and let us measure them honestly, so that if they work, we can make them the rule, we can all adopt things that work. And if they don't, we can stop and try something else. That's the only thing I ask of you. If we say, okay, we're going to have more waivers and you're going to be able to experiment in projects that use Federal dollars, let's measure the experiment, let's be honest about it. And if it works, let's tell everybody it works so we can all do it. And if it doesn't, let's have the courage to quit and admit it didn't.

I think all of us want what most people on welfare want, a country that gives you a hand up, not a handout. We don't have a person to waste. We need the talent, the energy, the skills of every man and woman, every boy and girl in this country.

Of all the problems we have with competitiveness, whether it is the deficit or the level of investment or anything else, I think all of us know in our heart of hearts America's biggest problem today is that too many of our people never get a shot at the American dream and that if all of our people were living up to the fullest of their potential, we would surely have a much easier path in solving all the issues that we constantly debate about at these meetings.

Of all my moments as Governor, one I remember with the most pride occurred here at a National Governors' Association meeting during that 2-year period when we were working on welfare reform. Governor Castle and I sponsored a panel, and I think 40 Governors attended. And we had welfare recipients from all over the country come in and talk to the Governors about what it was like to be on welfare.

A woman from Arkansas who was there, whom I knew but had not vetted for this conversation, started talking about her program and how she'd gone into a training program and she had gotten a job, all of that. And I did something lawyers are told never to do: I asked a question without knowing the answer. I said, "Do you think this program ought to be mandatory? Should everybody have to participate in this?" She said, "I sure do." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Well, because if it wasn't, there would be a lot of people like me home watching the soaps be-

cause we don't believe we can make anything of ourselves anymore. So you've got to make it mandatory." And I said, "What's the best thing about having a job?" She said, "When my boy goes to school, and they say, 'What does your mama do for a living?', he can give an answer."

I think that moment says more than I will ever be able to say about why this is important, not just important for the poor but important for the rest of us. We must end poverty for Americans who want to work. And we must do it on terms that dignify all of the rest of us, as well as help our country to work better. I need your help, and I think we can do it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. at the J.W. Marriott Hotel.

**Letter to Federal Emergency
Management Agency Acting
Director William C. Tidball on
Disaster Assistance for Louisiana**
February 2, 1993

Dear Mr. Tidball:

I have determined that the damage in certain areas of the State of Louisiana, resulting from severe storms and flooding on January 20 through January 25, 1993, is of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant a major disaster declaration under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act ("the Stafford Act"). I, therefore, declare that such a major disaster exists in the State of Louisiana.

In order to provide Federal assistance, you are hereby authorized to allocate from funds available for these purposes, such amounts as you find necessary for Federal disaster assistance and administrative expenses.

You are authorized to provide Individual Assistance in the designated areas. Public Assistance may be added at a later date, if requested and warranted. Consistent with the requirement that Federal assistance be supplemental, any Federal funds provided under the Stafford Act for Public Assistance will be